# Saʿīd al-Dīn al-Farghānī's Usage of the Term *waḥdat al-wujūd* and His Role in Ibn ʿArabī's School[1]

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## INTRODUCTION: *WAḤDAT AL-WUJŪD* IN THE WRITINGS OF IBN ʿARABĪ, QŪNAWĪ AND FARGHĀNĪ

The metaphysical doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (oneness of being) has been ascribed to Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī by various Islamic writers since the 14th century, and it is still closely associated with his name. However, it is widely acknowledged by scholars today that the Shaykh al-Akbar himself did not use the specific term *waḥdat al-wujūd*. The sole exception is the expression of *waḥdat wujūdik* (the oneness of your being) in one of Ibn ʿArabī's weekly prayers (*Awrād al-usbūʿ*),[2] which has only recently come to the attention of Western readers.

1. This article is a revised and expanded version of a paper which was first delivered at a Muslim–Christian symposium, organised by the author and held 20–21 February 2013 at the Jesuit centre 'Loyola Hall' in Lahore, Pakistan, and which was first published in its proceedings: *Mysticism in East and West – The Concept of the Unity of Being: Proceedings of the First Loyola Hall Symposium*, compiled and edited by Heike Stamer (Lahore: Multimedia Affairs, 2013), pp. 24–40.

2. Muḥyīddīn Ibn ʿArabī, *The Seven Days of the Heart. Awrād al-usbūʿ (Wird): Prayers for the Nights and Days of the Week*, trans. and presented in English by Pablo Beneito and Stephen Hirtenstein (Oxford, 2000). This particular prayer reads: '*Asʾaluka bi-s-sirri l-ladhī jamaʿta bihi bayna l-mutaqābilāti an tajmaʿa ʿalayya mutafarriqa amrī jamʿan yushhidunī waḥdata wujūdika*'. Trans.: 'I ask of You, by the mystery with which You unite the complementary contraries, that You bring together for me all that is disunited of my being, in such a union that I may contemplate and witness the Oneness of Your Being.' (p. 115). Beneito and Hirtenstein note (p. 121) that some manuscripts of this prayer actually read *waḥdat wujūdī* (the oneness of my being) – which of course would be an even more daring expression.

The general research assumption is that Ibn ʿArabī did develop the concept of a fundamental unity of everything that exists, whereas the technical term for this, *waḥdat al-wujūd*, was only coined later within his school. This explanation is plausible, yet it leaves some important questions unanswered. For instance, we still do not know from whom the technical term *waḥdat al-wujūd* originated; all we have are assumptions and possible names, but so far none of these have been proven. It is also not clear whether the various authors who used the term all shared the same understanding of what it actually means. This is the complex field of study on which I tried to shed some light in my master's thesis (submitted in German at the University of Zurich, 2010), on which this paper is based.

Among the immediate students and followers of the Akbarian school there were actually only two who employed the term *waḥdat al-wujūd*: Ibn ʿArabī's step-son and foremost disciple Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d.1274), who uses it twice in passing; and more frequently, Qūnawī's close disciple Saʿīd al-Dīn al-Farghānī (d.1300). Before examining Farghānī's work in detail, I would like briefly to turn to Qūnawī first, as he is an important and highly influential link between Ibn ʿArabī and Farghānī.

Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī was about thirty-three years old when his step-father Ibn ʿArabī died. He received the spiritual and intellectual authority of his master and directed a flourishing centre in Konya, where he was a contemporary and close friend of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī. Specialising in *ḥadīth* and philosophy, Qūnawī wrote about thirty works in Arabic and Persian. Five or six of them, including a commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, were of central importance for the spread and the reception of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings.[3] The influence of Qūnawī's writings and those of his immediate students was so significant that the Shaykh al-Akbar has always been seen through his eyes. Jāmī

3. See Jane Clark, 'Towards a Biography of Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī' in *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabi Society*, 49 (2011), 1–34. Also William C. Chittick, 'Ibn ʿArabī and His School' in *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (New York, 1991, pp. 49–79), pp. 54f.

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(d.1492) in his *Nafaḥāt al-uns* went so far as to say:

> Ibn ʿArabi's meaning in the question of the Oneness of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*) cannot be understood in a manner which is in keeping both with reason (*ʿaql*) and the Divine Law (*sharʿ*) unless one studies the investigations (*taḥqīqāt*) of Ṣadr al-Dīn and understands them as they must be understood.[4]

Qūnawī clearly mentioned in his testament that after his death his companions should not take up the 'problematic questions (*mujmalāt*) and the intricacies of the intuitive sciences (*maʿārif al-dhawqiyya*)', for after him the words of Ibn ʿArabī are 'closed passages' (*āyāt masdūda*). Instead, Qūnawī recommended them to focus on the determined (*manṣūṣ*) and unambiguous (*ṣarīḥ*) in his and his master's words, and to hold firmly to the Quran and the tradition and to their spiritual practices.[5] This shows, on the one hand, his concern that the true understanding of Ibn ʿArabī should end with him, and on the other, that he attaches more importance to Divine law (*sharʿ*) than to spiritual experience (*dhawq*).

With his firm grounding in philosophy, Qūnawī's discussions often revolved around the concept of *wujūd* (being, existence). Yet he used the expression *waḥdat al-wujūd*, or *waḥdat wujūdihi* (the oneness of His being), only in passing and certainly not as a technical term, while trying to explain the relationship between God's *wujūd* and *waḥda*, as the following passage shows:

> Know that the Real is sheer *wujūd* within which is no diversity and that He is one with a true oneness in contrast to which no manyness can be conceptualized... All things perceived in the entities and witnessed in the engendered things...are the properties of *wujūd*; or, call them the forms of the relationships within His knowledge... Call them what you like: They are not *wujūd*, since *wujūd* is one... *Wujūd* cannot be perceived by a human being inasmuch as he is one with a true oneness, like *waḥdat al-wujūd*...

4. Quoted from William Chittick, 'The Last Will and Testament of Ibn ʿArabi's Foremost Disciple and Some Notes on its Author' in *Sophia Perennis*, 4 (1978), 43–58, see 43.

5. Ibid., 53.

> Nothing issues from God, in respect of the *waḥda* of His *wujūd* [*waḥdat wujūdihi*], except one.[6]

The quoted passage indicates that Qūnawī understands the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* in the sense of 'true oneness' in which there is no manyness. All engendered things are only the properties of *wujūd*; they are the forms of His relationships within the Divine knowledge. Apart from this passage, there is one more instance in another work where Qūnawī mentions *waḥdat wujūdihi* (the oneness of His being).[7]

Among Qūnawī's many students and disciples, two were particularly important for the spread of the Akbarian school: the first, Muʾayyid al-Dīn al-Jandī (d.1291), is well known for his commentary on Ibn ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*; the second, Saʿīd al-Dīn al-Farghānī,[8] is renowned for his commentary on *al-Tāʾiyya al-kubrā* (also called *Naẓm al-sulūk*, i.e. 'Poem of the Sufi Way') by the famous Egyptian poet ʿUmar Ibn al-Fāriḍ

6. Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, *Miftāḥ al-ghayb*, published on the margin of its commentary *Miftāḥ al-uns* by Fānārī (Tehran, 1323/1905), pp. 52–9. Quoted from William Chittick, 'Rūmī and *waḥdat al-wujūd*' in *Poetry and mysticism in Islam: The heritage of Rūmī*, Proceedings of the Giorgio Levi Della Vida Conference, held May 8–10, 1987 at the University of California, eds. A. Banani, R. Hovannisian and G. Sabagh (Cambridge, 1994, pp. 71–111).

7. The passage can be found in Qūnawī's *al-Nafaḥāt al-ilāhiyya* (Tehran, 1316/1898–1899), p. 279.

8. Saʿīd al-Dīn al-Farghānī can be considered Qūnawī's close disciple, although we know from his own testimony that he was not initiated by him, because he had already received the 'cloak of discipleship' (*khirqat-i irādat*) from a different teacher, Shaykh Najīb al-Dīn ʿAlī ibn Buzghush Shīrāzī, who in turn had received it from Shihāb al-Dīn ʿUmar al-Suhrawardī, the founder of the Suhrawardiyya order. Jāmī in his *Nafaḥāt al-uns* relates the words of Farghānī as follows: 'Thus, after leaving the service and companionship of Shaykh Najīb al-Dīn, I joined our master and lord… Shaykh Ṣadr al-Dīn… Qūnawī, and through the distinction of being his companion, I received spiritual direction and guidance and borrowed inward and outward virtues and discipline as well as the sciences of the Law, the Way and the Truth. Hence I received training and profited to the utmost limit.' Quoted from Chittick, 'Last Will and Testament', 45f.

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(d.1235).[9] It is this commentary (*sharḥ*) which is the focus of my study because here Farghānī uses the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* on several occasions.

Farghānī's commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi poem *al-Tāʾiyya al-kubrā* was first published in the Persian language under the Arabic title ***Mashāriq al-darārī al-zuhar*** ('The Rising Places of the Shining Stars').[10] This commentary is based squarely on Qūnawī's teachings. Over a period of time Farghānī had listened to Qūnawī's explanations on this poem, taken notes and then edited them into a work of his own.

Qūnawī himself describes in his short preface to Farghānī's Persian commentary that in the year 643 of the *hijra* (1245/46, i.e. five years after Ibn ʿArabī's death) he travelled with several of his students and companions to Egypt, and that during this journey he read and explained the 'Poem of the Sufi Way' to them. He continued this practice in Syria and also after returning to Anatolia. According to Qūnawī, many of his listeners took notes in order to compile them into recensions, but the most successful of these was by Farghānī.[11] In terms of the intellectual development of Ibn ʿArabī's teachings, this Persian commentary is highly relevant, as it contains the main tenets of the Shaykh al-Akbar's metaphysical concepts as developed by Qūnawī.[12]

9. For an English translation of this poem, see: ʿUmar Ibn ʿAlī Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *The Poem of the Way*, trans. into English verse from the Arabic of Ibn al-Fāriḍ by A.J. Arberry, Chester Beatty Monographs No. 5 (London, 1952). For a transcription into Roman script, see: ʿUmar Ibn ʿAlī Ibn al-Fāriḍ, *The mystical poems of Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, edited in transcription from the oldest extant manuscript in the Chester Beatty Collection, trans. and annotated by A.J. Arberry, Chester Beatty Monographs No. 4 (London, 1952).

10. Saʿīd al-Dīn al-Farghānī, *Mashāriq al-darārī – Sharḥ Tāʾiyyat Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, edited by Sayyid Jalāl ad-Dīn Āshtiyānī (Mashhad, 1398/1977).

11. Preface to Farghānī's *Mashāriq*, p. 5f. See also Chittick's mention of this account in two of his articles: 'Spectrums of Islamic thought: Saʿīd al-Dīn al-Farghānī on the implication of oneness and manyness' in *The Heritage of Sufism, vol. II: The legacy of medieval Persian Sufism (1150–1500)*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London, 1992, pp. 203–17), see p. 207; and 'Rūmī and *waḥdat al-wujūd*', p. 80.

12. Cf. Chittick, 'Spectrums', p. 207.

Farghānī later translated his work into Arabic with the title ***Muntahā al-madārik*** ('The Utmost Limit of Perception').[13] The reasons for this are not stated anywhere, but it was probably in order to further increase the scope of its availability to new readers. Since the poem (*al-Tāʾiyya al-kubrā* / *Naẓm al-sulūk*) on which it is based stems from the pen of an Egyptian and was composed in Arabic, and since the commentary was started during travels in Egypt and Syria, it seems natural that most of the people interested in the poem – and thus in commentaries on it – would also be from the Arabic-speaking community. Also, it was normal in Farghānī's circle to publish works in Persian as well as in Arabic; Qūnawī and Jandī also wrote in both languages.

Another student from this circle, Shams al-Dīn Īkī (d.1289), describes the circumstances of Farghānī's work, as related by Jāmī in his *Nafaḥāt al-uns*:

> In the sessions of our Shaykh [Ṣadr al-Dīn] the possessors and seekers of knowledge used to attend. The Shaykh would speak about different sciences. Then he would end the session with one verse from the 'Poem of the Way', upon which he would comment in Persian. He expounded marvellous words and God-given meanings, but only the possessors of tasting (*dhawq*) could understand him. Sometimes on another day he would say that a different meaning of the verse had become manifest for him, and he would explain a meaning more wonderful and subtle than before. He often used to say, 'One must be a Sufi to learn this poem and be able to clarify its meaning for others.'... Shaykh Saʿīd Farghānī would devote all his attention to understand what our Shaykh said, and then he would record it. He wrote an explanation of the poem first in Persian and then in Arabic. This was all because of the blessing of our Shaykh, Ṣadr al-Dīn.[14]

13. Saʿīd al-Dīn al-Farghānī, *Muntahā al-madārik fī sharḥ Tāʾiyyat Ibn al-Fāriḍ* (Beirut, 2007, 2 vols.).

14. Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt al-uns*, p. 542, quoted from Chittick, 'Spectrums', p. 207, n. 4.

During the process of translating his commentary into Arabic, Farghānī modified and extended many of his original passages, thus changing the content, order and length of the new Arabic edition. Hence, the Arabic version ***Muntahā al-madārik*** cannot be regarded as a mere translation of the Persian original version ***Mashāriq al-darārī***, but rather as a work on its own. In order to simplify the matter, one could say that the Persian version is basically a compilation of Qūnawī's comments on the poem (given that it was also officially approved by him), and that the Arabic re-edition is much more of an elaboration of Farghānī's own thought and worldview.

However, the fact that the Persian original version is based on Qūnawī's teachings does not mean that every word that Farghānī uses is taken directly from the mouth of his teacher. Since Farghānī is known as an independent thinker, it can be assumed that his notes from Qūnawī's lectures only served as the basis from which he drew his inspiration. Ultimately, one can only speculate about the degree to which his words mirror those of Qūnawī. When Farghānī uses the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* in his commentary, one cannot simply assume that he adopted this expression from Qūnawī, especially since – as mentioned above – the latter hardly ever used the term in his own writings.

In Ibn al-Fāriḍ's poem *al-Tā'iyya al-kubrā*, which is a mystical love poem with monistic tendencies, the expression *waḥdat al-wujūd* is never used, but the word *wujūd* quite often is. In fact, only the first 163 verses are the love poem, after which the lyrical speaker abruptly states that it is time to explain himself. The next almost 600 verses are detailed instructions about the Sufi way, addressed to the spiritual seeker. Ibn al-Fāriḍ, who in his youth had studied Shāfi'ī law and Ḥadīth, uses a very sophisticated language abounding with technical terms from the fields of Islamic mysticism, law and theology. At the same time, his admirers perceived his verses to arise from Divine ecstasy. Not only is Ibn al-Fāriḍ said to have often fallen into a trance or mystical state during the recitation of the *Tā'iyya*, but his audience as well, including his critics. However, some religious scholars like Ibn Taymiyya considered the *Tā'iyya* heretical due to its monistic traits, and sharply criticised the poem and its commentators.

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An important feature of the new Arabic version of the commentary is its long introduction (*muqaddima*) in which Farghānī describes his ontological conceptions, that is, the levels of the universe and the two stages of Divine Self-disclosure (*tajallī*). This *muqaddima* was so popular that it was also circulated among readers on its own, without the actual poetry commentary.

Giuseppe Scattolin, an Italian Dominican friar and professor for Islamic Mysticism who closely studied the Arabic version of Farghānī's commentary and especially its *muqaddima*, considers the Arabic edition to be of particular historical importance, since it is the first of a long series of commentaries on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical poem *al-Tāʾiyya al-kubrā*.[15]

Farghānī's works were undoubtedly very popular in the Sufi circles of his time: they may even have been more widely read than Ibn ʿArabī's works themselves – and this certainly makes him an influential member of the Akbarian school.

## FARGHĀNĪ'S ONTOLOGY ACCORDING TO THE *MUQADDIMA* OF HIS ARABIC POETRY COMMENTARY

The introduction to Farghānī's Arabic commentary ***Muntahā al-madārik***, and thus the whole book, opens with the well-known *ḥadīth qudsī* (Divine saying) concerning God as the Hidden Treasure:

> *Kuntu kanzan makhfiyyan wa-aḥbabtu an uʿrafa fa-khalaqtu ʾl-khalq li-uʿrafa*.[16]
>
> I was a hidden treasure, and I loved to be known, therefore I created creation, that I might be known.

15. Giuseppe Scattolin, 'Al-Farghānī's Commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's mystical poem *Al-Tāʾiyyat al-kubrā*' in *MIDEO* (*Institut Dominicain d'Etudes Orientales du Caire: Mélanges*), 21 (1993), 331–83, see 336. A slightly shortened and edited version of this study from 1993 was published as 'The Key Concepts of al-Farghānī's Commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ's Sufi Poem, *al-Tāʾiyyat al-Kubrā*' in *JMIAS*, 39 (2006), 33–83.

16. *Muntahā*, vol. 1, p. 18.

This *ḥadīth* about the 'hidden treasure' (or in Ibn ʿArabī's wording: the 'unknown treasure') has always been of central importance to those within the school of Ibn ʿArabī, as it can be said to describe their worldview in a nutshell. The rest of Farghānī's introduction is basically an elaboration of this *ḥadīth*, depicting love (*ḥubb*; *maḥabba*) as the major force that brought about the universe[17] – as God says: *aḥbabtu an uʿrafa*, 'I loved to be known'.

The following scheme illustrates his ontology, as described in the introduction (*muqaddima*) of the Arabic version of his poetry commentary: The **First Self-disclosure** (*tajallī*) is still in the realm of absolute unity. The **Second Self-disclosure** moves in a circle. It begins with a journeying out into multiplicity through the different elements and levels of manifestation, in a movement of descent (*nuzūl*). When the human level is reached, it is a journeying back to its original unity through different stations of the spiritual path, in a movement of ascent (*ʿurūj*).

Apart from a few minor terminological differences, Farghānī's teachings on the levels of the universe are in accordance with Ibn ʿArabī's.

17. See also *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 2, p.112 (Beirut, n.d.) where Ibn ʿArabī says: '*al-ḥubb kāna sabab ījād al-ʿālam*', i.e. 'Love was the reason for the coming into being of the universe'.

## Farghānī's ontology according to his introduction to *Muntahā al-madārik*[18]

[to be read clockwise]:

**First Self-disclosure**,
*Aḥadiyya / waḥdat al-wujūd*,
*Maqām 'aw adnā'* (utmost nearness)[19]

*Maqām 'qāba qawsayn'* ('two bows')
= highest station of union (*tawḥīd*)

**Second Self-disclosure**, *Kun!* (Be!),
Divine names, loci of manifestation

Disengagement (*tajrīd*)
[from substrata]
Aloneness (*tafrīd*)

Level of spirits, symbolised by
High Pen (= First Intellect) and
Preserved Tablet

Stability within alteration
(*al-tamkīn fi al-talwīn*). Being
clothed (*talbīs*)[in substrata]

Level of imagination and bodies,
symbolised by God's Throne
and His Footstool

Utmost comprehensiveness
(*ḥaḍrat jam' al-jam'*)

Seven Heavenly Spheres,
correlating to the Seven
Leading Names

Contraction (*qabḍ*)

Expansion (*basṭ*)

Dust/prima materia (*al-habā'*)
Four basic principles of nature:
heat and cold, humidity and
dryness

*Maqām al-tamkīn*: relative stability;
Consciousness of the unity of the
Divine names, but *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*
are seen as veils for each other

Four basic elements: fire, air,
water, earth

*Maqām al-talwīn*:
station of alteration

Mineral world

*Al-tajallī al-ẓāhirī*: everything
is a veil for the human being

Vegetable world

Repentance (*tawba*) through
inner light (*nūr fiṭrī*) and the
call of the prophets

Animal world

Man: image of God and image of creation
Adam: prototype of man
Muḥammad: highest level of human perfection

18. Devised by myself, this scheme gives an overview and is not a complete depiction of the various levels, states and stations which Farghānī mentions in his *muqaddima*.

19. The station of *qāba qawsayn* ('two bows') and the station of *aw adnā* (literally: 'or nearer') are terms drawn from the Quranic Sura 53, which describes God's approach to Muḥammad through Gabriel. Verses 7 to 9 read: '[7] While he [Gabriel] was in the highest part of the horizon, [8]

## ANALYSIS OF THE TERM *WAḤDAT AL-WUJŪD* IN FARGHĀNĪ'S WORK

The main objective of my master's thesis, and hence of this paper, is to clarify whether it was Farghānī who established *waḥdat al-wujūd* as a technical term of Sufism. My research comprised the following three steps:

(1) searching for the term *waḥdat-i wujūd* / *waḥdat al-wujūd* in both editions of the book;
(2) the translation and analysis of three relevant passages from each edition;
(3) a comparison between the ontological conceptions of Farghānī, Ibn ʿArabī and later authors.

To begin with, I visually scanned both the Persian and Arabic editions of Farghānī's book for mention of the term in question. I found that in the Persian original version it appears 41 times, whereas in the author's own Arabic translation of his book the term is used only 22 times. This is a very telling fact in itself, as it indicates that Farghānī did not place much emphasis on the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* and did not use it as a technical term; had he done so, he would surely have used it more consistently in his Arabic translation.

Secondly – which represents the main part of my thesis – I translated three relevant passages from the two editions[20] and examined them in a comparative way, especially focusing on the changes that Farghānī made concerning the term *waḥdat al-wujūd*.

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he approached [Muḥammad] and came closer, [9] and there was a distance of two bows or nearer (*fa-kāna qāba qawsayn aw adnā*).' Both are seen as the highest stations of closeness to God. In Farghānī's view, *qāba qawsayn* can be reached by saints and masters, whereas the station of *aw adnā* is only accessible to Muḥammad (see Scattolin, 'Al-Farghānī's Commentary', 344).

20. These passages are Farghānī's commentaries on three poetic verses from the *Tāʾiyya*: verses 147, 481 and 743. Since the complete translations of the three commentaries are given in my thesis, due to limitations of space I shall only refer to two short excerpts here for the purpose of illustration.

The process of scanning both editions revealed that only these three selected passages contain the terms *waḥdat-i wujūd* (Persian) or *waḥdat al-wujūd* (Arabic) within their equivalent contexts. Elsewhere, when these terms are used in one edition, the other edition makes use of a different phrasing.

Furthermore, both the cursory scanning of the two editions and a close examination of the three selected passages would indicate that Farghānī rarely used the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* in its 'pure' form: in most cases he added other attributes or close associations to this term. When 'being' is mentioned, it is often specified as 'entified/individuated' (*ʿaynī*) or 'manifest' (*ẓāhirī*), thus emphasising that the entified, self-identified aspect of 'being' is part of the 'Real Being' (*al-wujūd al-ḥaqq*), that is, God. This gives us a clue to Farghānī's ontology.

Another important finding is that, in most cases when Farghānī uses the word *waḥda* (oneness), he also immediately mentions its opposite, *kathra* (manyness). Oneness and manyness therefore constitute two ends of the same spectrum: they mirror and complement each other.

Although the renowned American scholar William Chittick places great emphasis on Farghānī's juxtaposition of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (oneness of being) with the particular term *kathrat al-ʿilm* (manyness of knowledge),[21] I was unable to establish a regular usage of it in my study. In the Persian edition (*Mashāriq*) I found only ten instances where Farghānī juxtaposes *waḥdat al-wujūd* with the term *kathrat al-ʿilm* or *kathrat al-maʿlūmāt* (manyness of known things), and in the Arabic edition (*Muntahā*) I was unable to find a single instance of the two terms combined in one passage. Moreover, in the three passages which I selected from both editions for closer examination in my thesis, the particular term *kathrat al-ʿilm* does not appear at all.

In the Arabic edition, which one may assume contains more of Farghānī's own elaborations, the term *kathrat al-ʿilm* is generally used very rarely; however, the single words *ʿilm* and *ḥikma* (wisdom) appear often, even more often than in the Per-

21. Cf. Chittick, 'Rūmī and *waḥdat al-wujūd*', pp. 80f. and 87.

sian edition. Thus, the concept of 'manyness of knowledge' can be implied in many cases when the word *kathra* (manyness) is being used, just like the concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* can be implied in Ibn ʿArabī's writings, even though he does not use this particular term.

The following two examples from both editions (using my translations) are illustrations as to how Farghānī uses the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* and how he modifies his wording in the Arabic edition in the process of his own translation from the Persian.

### Example 1
### Extract from Farghānī's commentary on verse 481 of the *Tāʾiyya*:

Verse 481 of the *Tāʾiyya* reads:

> *Wa-ākhiru maḥwin jāʾa khatmīya, baʿdah / ka-awwali ṣaḥwin, li-rtisāmin bi-ʿiddatí.*
>
> The last obliteration, after which came my sealing / is like the first sobriety, because it is characterised by number. [my trans.]

In the excerpt below from Farghānī's commentary on this verse, he explains how the spiritual seeker, after the effacement of the self in the station of obliteration (*maḥw*), can witness the oneness of being in the mirror of manyness.[22]

22. In his complete commentary on this verse, Farghānī explains that there is an obliteration and effacement (*maḥw wa-fanāʾ*) on three universal levels, i.e. that of the self (*nafs*), of the spirit (*rūḥ*) and of the 'all-comprehensiveness' (*jamʿ*). The latter refers to the station of closeness to God as being within the distance of two bows' lengths (*maqām qāba qawsayn*) or shorter. Beyond these three levels which are generally accessible to the prophets and saints, there is a fourth level (*maqām aw adnā*) which is reserved exclusively for Muḥammad (cf. scheme of Farghānī's ontology above).

During the effacement of the self and its attributes (level 1) the oneness of being is witnessed in the mirror of manyness, as described in the extract. By contrast, during the effacement of the spirit, the manyness is witnessed in the mirror of the oneness of being. During the effacement on the level of all-comprehensiveness (level 3), both kinds of witnessing are unified,

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| *Mashāriq* (Persian version) | *Muntahā* (Arabic version) |
|---|---|
| Since obliteration and effacement have three universal stations relating to the prophets and saints in general, and a fourth one relating to the Seal of the Prophets in particular – God's blessings be upon him and them – the first one consists in obliteration and effacement of the self and its attributes. Therein, the **oneness of being (*waḥdat-i wujūd*)** is witnessed, in the sense that in the mirror of the manyness of the realities (*āyīna-yi kathrat-i ḥaqā'iq*) knowledge and its attributes are imprinted. For whenever the mirror becomes full of imprints, the surface of the mirror is entirely hidden, and what is imprinted becomes apparent in it by virtue of its descriptions (*waṣf*). | The first [station] of them is the obliteration of the manyness of the self (*kathrat al-nafs*) and of its original and accidental attributes and the effacement thereof. The final goal and result of this [first station] is rapture and subsistence by virtue of the subsistence of the unitary apparent being (*baqā' al-wujūd al-ẓāhir al-waḥdānī*). What is witnessed in this state is the **oneness of being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*)**, which is apparent (*ẓāhir*) in the mirror of the manyness of the attributes of the self (*mir'āt kathrat al-ṣifāt al-nafsiyya*), and the witnessing of the entity of what is imprinted (*shuhūd 'ayn al-munṭabi'*) and its appearance in the mirror, while the mirror itself becomes hidden (*ma'a khafā'*),* taking place in the same way as it is in the case of the apparent phenomena. |

* The word that Farghānī uses here, *khafā'* (hiding), has the same root as the word *makhfī* in the *ḥadīth qudsī* '*Kuntu kanzan makhfiyyan…*' (I was a hidden treasure…).

## Example 2
## Extract from Farghānī's commentary on verse 743 of the *Tā'iyya*:

Verse 743 of the *Tā'iyya* reads:

*Wa-lawlā ḥijābu l-kawni qultu, wa-innamā / qiyāmī bi-aḥkāmi l-maẓāhiri muskitī.*

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despite the persistence of plurality. This last effacement (*maḥw*) on the third level, which is what verse 481of the *Tā'iyya* refers to, is like the first sobriety (*ṣaḥw*), because in both stations the spiritual seeker is screened from the witnessing of the 'utmost comprehensiveness' (*aḥadiyyat al-jam'*) and of the 'utmost nearness' (*maqām aw adnā*), where no plurality persists.

As an example of a saint who has mastered this third station, Farghānī refers to Shaykh Abū Sa'īd al-Kharrāz (d.899 or earlier), a Sufi from Baghdad, who is also quoted by Ibn 'Arabī on several occasions (*Fut.*2:379, 2:500, 2:512; 4:39, 4:325) in order to illustrate God's unity in diversity. See Abrahamov, *Ibn al-'Arabī and the Sufis* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 63–7.

If it was not for the veil of the engendered existence, I would speak… But / my holding on to the properties of the loci of manifestation makes me keep quiet. [my trans.]

In the following excerpt from Farghānī's commentary on this verse, he explains that the engendered existence (*kawn*) with its manyness of levels and realities is both a mirror in which the Real Being is manifested, and a veil, because the properties of the levels of existence screen the human being from witnessing the oneness of being:[23]

23. In his complete commentary on this verse, Farghānī explains that all is one and that nothing else, and hence also nothing condemnable, exists but that it is nevertheless necessary to keep to the rules of engendered existence. This entails that the lyrical speaker of the *Tā'iyya* does not talk about his experience of the oneness of being. Engendered existence with its various levels and realities is a mirror in which the Real Being is revealed, and at the same time also a veil, as the properties at the level of the human being hinder him from witnessing oneness.

Engendered existence has two sides (*wajh*): the one, that of all-comprehensiveness and justice which are effects of oneness, and the other, that of manyness with all its deviations. Both sides put certain constraints (*qayd*) on the human being, and if he disregards them he has to face the consequences. The properties of the first side are surrender (*islām*) and firm belief (*īmān*) in God and adherence to the Divine law; this kind of obedience (*inqiyād*) leads to the highest joys and pleasures in paradise. The properties of the second side are ignorance and denial of the message of God, and this disobedience leads to punishment in hell.

However, if the human being frees himself from the ties that bind him to the levels as and when he experiences the infinite realm of the world of oneness, then he is also freed from his religious duties (*takālīf*), because here – like the fools and the obsessed – he can no longer distinguish between good and bad. Nevertheless, there is a certain danger after he returns from experiencing oneness, when the effect of this experience still lingers on in him. At such a time he could be declared a heretic because of his statements – and this is what the lyrical speaker of the *Tā'iyya* tries to avoid by keeping silent.

However, Farghānī reiterates that there is nothing bad *per se* in the oneness of being and that God is both the Guide (*hādī*) and the Misleader (*muḍill*) and that everything serves to manifest the completeness (*kamāl*) of His names.

| *Mashāriq* (Persian version) | *Muntahā* (Arabic version) |
|---|---|
| […] The levels of the realities and of the engendered existence (*kawn*) with all their properties are a veil hiding the reality of **being and its oneness** and all-comprehensiveness (*ḥaqīqat-i wujūd wa-waḥdat wa-jamʿiyyat-i ū*). Thus, as long as a certain property relating to the realities (*ḥukmī ḥaqīqī*) and a certain level prevail on a person, he is veiled from the reality of the **oneness** and all-comprehensiveness **of being** (*ḥaqīqat-i waḥdat wa-jamʿiyyat-i wujūd*) and from witnessing its world. | […] The **oneness of being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*)**, then, lies only behind the veil of the manyness of the engendered realities (*kathrat al-ḥaqāʾiq al-kawniyya*).<br><br>Thus, as long as one of the effects and properties of the engendered existence and of its levels prevails on a person or appears in him, not a thing will become manifest onto him of the **oneness of being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*)** and its all-comprehensiveness and of the property of non-difference (*ḥukm ʿadam al-mughāyara*) in whatever he may behold. |
| Every reality of the engendered existence, which is a locus of manifestation as well as a mirror of being (*āyīna-yi wujūd*), has two sides with regard to the manifestation of their being and of their properties in the levels, and hence their being is circumscribed by the properties of the levels: | Every reality of the engendered existence has two sides in terms of its being circumscribed by the engendered existence and by the properties of its levels: |
| The first side faces toward the all-comprehensiveness and justice, and this is the shade of the **oneness of being** (*ẓill-i waḥdat-i wujūd*). | One side faces toward the being (*wujūd*), which makes to appear its properties, attributes and effects. This side requires the appearance of the effect of oneness (*ẓuhūr athar al-waḥda*), i.e. the justice, all-comprehensiveness, lightness and trueness as well as the lifting of the veils and the susceptibility to the effect of guidance and the quality of God being the Merciful (*raḥīmiyya*). |
| The second side faces toward the manyness (*kathra*) and the infinite deviations, and each side of these two sides has a certain property and effect […]. | The other side faces toward its self (*nafs*) and its concomitant phenomena (*tawābiʿ*), and this side requires the appearance therein of the manyness, deviation, darkness and unreality (*buṭlān*) and the prevalence of the property of being veiled as well as the appearance of the effect of misguidance (*iḍlāl*) and of being forced (*qahr*). […] |

This second excerpt exemplifies how Farghānī uses, in the Persian edition, long phrases such as 'the veil of the reality of being and its oneness and all-comprehensiveness' (*ḥijāb-i ḥaqīqat-i wujūd wa-waḥdat wa-jamʿiyyat-i ū*) or 'the reality of the oneness and all-comprehensiveness of being and the witnessing of its world' (*ḥaqīqat-i waḥdat wa-jamʿiyyat-i wujūd wa-shuhūd-i ʿālam-i ū*). In the equivalent paragraph of the Arabic edition, however, Farghānī simply speaks of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, thereby reducing the complexity of the phrase and making this particular term more prominent.

From the two excerpts it can be seen that the two editions of Farghānī's *Tāʾiyya* commentary are indeed quite different. In the process of translation, he changed nearly every sentence, sometimes shortening a passage, but more often extending it, amplifying his writing with additional aspects and explanations. All the while, it must be kept in mind that the selected examples are more similar and comparable to each other than most other passages from the book. (As stated above, there are only three cases in Farghānī's whole *Tāʾiyya* commentary in which *waḥdat-i wujūd* / *waḥdat al-wujūd* is used in both editions in the same context.)

The specimen texts also give us an insight into Farghānī's usage of oneness (*waḥda*) and manyness (*kathra*) as a distinctive pair of opposites, although in general he more frequently uses the former than the latter. This may have to do with Farghānī's worldview, according to which only the 'one being' (*al-wujūd al-wāḥid*) is the necessary being, whereas everything that belongs to engendered existence ('*kawn*', that is, everything that came into being by the Divine command '*Kun!*', 'Be!') has no independent being of its own and belongs to the realm of possibility (*imkān*). Manyness is thus part of oneness and will eventually merge back into it (cf. the scheme of Farghānī's ontology).

On the levels of the spiritual path, as described in the second extract, it is sometimes the oneness and sometimes the manyness which prevails and which is witnessed in the mirror of its opposite, which is at that time hidden, until eventually

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all opposites are united.[24] The motif of the mirror that Farghānī uses here in order to explain the relationship between oneness and manyness is probably borrowed from Ibn ʿArabī. However, the pivotal role that Farghānī assigns to the polarity of oneness and manyness seems to be something that is unique to Farghānī's writings, and may be an attempt to explain his pantheistic worldview in a way that also acknowledges manyness.

A philological analysis of all the passages which I examined closely for my thesis generally supports the assumption that Farghānī did not use *waḥdat al-wujūd* then as a technical term, but rather as one of many possible expressions to describe his ontological conception of the 'oneness of being'. Nevertheless, considering the frequency of its usage throughout the book, one could say that it was in the process of becoming such a technical term. Given the wide circulation of Farghānī's works, which were extremely popular in the Islamic world at the time when the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* started to be used on a broader scale, it is very likely that his usage of the term inadvertently contributed to the coining of it as a technical term.

## COMPARISON OF FARGHĀNĪ WITH IBN ʿARABĪ AND SOME LATER AUTHORS

In the third step of my research, I compared Farghānī's ontological conception to the original ideas of Ibn ʿArabī and to some later authors who have spread the latter's teachings.

24. However, the veil that screens the human being from perceiving the underlying all-encompassing unity is important and necessary. Farghānī further explains in his commentary on verse 743 that it is an expressed goal of the spiritual path to get glimpses of what lies behind this veil, but that it also bears certain dangers: any seeker who claims to have 'seen God through God' (*shāhada al-wāḥid al-ḥaqq bi-l-ḥaqq*) is, according to Farghānī, a heretic (*zindīq*), whose blood may be shed (*mubāḥ al-dam*). At the same time, Farghānī's elaborations on the need to keep silent (which is expressed by the lyrical speaker of the *Tāʾiyya* in verse 743: '…my holding onto the properties of the loci of manifestation makes me keep quiet') suggest that the claims of such people are not wrong, only inadequate.

In general, Farghānī's teachings resemble those of the Shaykh al-Akbar, borrowing many metaphors, symbols and expressions from him. Also, Farghānī's discussion of oneness and manyness has a certain basis in Ibn ʿArabī's writings, in so far as the latter sometimes depicts God as 'the One/Many' (*al-wāḥid al-kathīr*). However, while Farghānī evokes quite a strong polarity between *waḥda* and *kathra*, Ibn ʿArabī's notion of *al-wāḥid al-kathīr* can be seen as a paradox.

Ibn ʿArabī's writings abound with apparent contradictions, the most well known among them being his oft-repeated statement: *huwa/lā huwa* – 'He/not He'. This paradox is further explained in his concept of *tanzīh* (God's otherness, transcendence) and *tashbīh* (God's immanence in creation), both modalities existing at the same time, just as God is – according to the Quran (57:3) – both the hidden (*al-bāṭin*) and the manifest (*al-ẓāhir*). Through His Divine names, with which He manifests His qualities in the cosmos, God has a resemblance to His created objects. However, since they do not have an independent being of their own and are only expressions of the Divine, God is incomparable, the eternal Other. Only the perfect human being (*al-insān al-kāmil*) is able to see God's transcendence and immanence at the same time.[25] In this way, Ibn ʿArabī distances himself from certain Persian mystics who used to exclaim '*Hamā ū-st!*' ('All is He!') – a statement which can be seen as contradictory to the Quran.

Farghānī's understanding of *waḥdat al-wujūd* shows both tendencies: he leans toward the pantheistic vision that 'all is one', yet his constant occupation with the phenomenon of manyness also puts him on the track of Ibn ʿArabī's 'He/not He'.

However, Ibn ʿArabī's various paradoxes and ambiguities make it difficult to pinpoint his exact stance, especially when it comes to the question of monism, and that again makes it difficult to compare him with other authors. Most contemporary experts in the field of Ibn ʿArabī – first and foremost William Chittick – dismiss the idea that Ibn ʿArabī's ontology includes oneness in the pantheistic or materialistic sense, a view which

25. Chittick, 'Rūmī and *waḥdat al-wujūd*', pp. 76–7.

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was also reiterated by Bakri Aladdin in his recent article on 'Oneness of Being'.[26]

Chittick asserts that Ibn ʿArabī's teachings revolve around the term *al-wujūd al-ḥaqq*, that is, 'the Real Being', rather than around *waḥdat al-wujūd*. According to Chittick, the word *wujūd* (being) in Ibn ʿArabī's own works always refers to God himself, not to His manifestations.[27] Thus, *wujūd* is just another word for the Real (*al-ḥaqq*). So if Ibn ʿArabī says that *wujūd* is one, this means nothing other than 'God is one', and this equals the most fundamental Islamic principle of *tawḥīd*, the oneness of God. Chittick summarises his opinion about the endless discussions on *waḥdat al-wujūd* as follows:

> In other words, to say that Ibn ʿArabī believed in *waḥdat al-wujūd* is to state the obvious. [...] Why then did the later tradition make such a big issue out of belief in *waḥdat al-wujūd*? The answer is that technical senses were ascribed to the expression by later authors, and some of these were problematic, to say the least. Those who criticized the expression had certain meanings in mind, and those who defended the expression typically had other meanings in mind. When any of these authors said that Ibn ʿArabī believed in *waḥdat al-wujūd*, they were attributing to him a doctrine that he did not necessarily hold. This is the key point, and it helps explain why the expression remains controversial. Anyone who says that Ibn ʿArabī, or someone else, believed in *waḥdat al-wujūd* should be prepared to defend his position by defining the specific meaning of *waḥdat al-wujūd* that he has in mind. If he claims that for Ibn ʿArabī, *waḥdat al-wujūd* means anything other than 'God is one', he will need to provide solid textual evidence to prove his point.[28]

26. Bakri Aladdin, 'Oneness of Being (*waḥdat al-wujud*): The term and the doctrine', in *JMIAS*, 51 (2012), 3–26.

27. Cf. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, NY, 1989), p. 79; and 'Rūmī and *waḥdat al-wujūd*', p. 72.

28. William Chittick, 'The Central Point: Qūnawī's Role in the School of Ibn ʿArabī', in *JMIAS*, 35 (2004), 25–45, see 29.

If one assumes that Chittick is right in stating that the word *wujūd* in Ibn ʿArabī's writings always needs to be understood as *al-wujūd al-ḥaqq* (the Real Being, that is, God), then Farghānī might be thought not to be in agreement with Ibn ʿArabī. All too often, Farghānī talks of *al-wujūd al-ʿaynī al-ẓāhirī*, 'the entified, manifest being', which shows that he does apply the term 'being' to the engendered levels of creation, not only to the Real Being. However, as is shown by a close reading of the actual way that Ibn ʿArabī uses the term *al-wujūd*, Farghānī is closer to his master than might at first appear. For example, the very first line in the *Futūḥāt* refers to things (*ashyāʾ*) to which God has given existence (*wujūd*) and brought them out of non-existence (*ʿadam*) and its non-existence (*ʿadamihi*).[29] There is thus no doubting that Ibn ʿArabī speaks of engendered things having existence at the level of manifest appearance. Moreover, it appears to me that this subsisting paradox of dualism and/or monism is actually what best explains the fundamental nature of the world. In the words of the American Catholic theologian and Buddhist, Paul F. Knitter:

> It is not just that 'we live and move and have our being in God' (Bible, Acts 17:28), but also, just as much, it is 'God who lives and moves and has God's being in us'. God and the world – they really are 'not two' (non-dualism), but neither are they one (non-monism).[30]

If God and His creation are neither two nor one, it is not surprising that the issue of *waḥdat al-wujūd* has been so hotly debated for centuries and is still not settled. Maybe Qūnawī was right after all with the concern he stated in his *Last Will and Testament*:

> I enjoin my companions not to take up after me the problematic questions in the intricacies of the intuitive sciences. Rather they should limit themselves to pondering that which is unambiguous

29. *Fut.*1:1.

30. As presented in his public talk at the University of Hamburg on 6 February 2014 at the inauguration of the international research project 'Religion and Dialogue in Modern Societies'.

> and clearly determined without trying to interpret what is not plain and unambiguous, whether in my words or the words of the Shaykh. For after me these are closed passages… So after my death they should be prudent and limit themselves to the unambiguous and plain in my words and writings and in the writings of the Shaykh – may God be pleased with him.[31]

Speaking of Qūnawī, it is worth restating that in the only two instances in which he himself mentions *waḥdat al-wujūd*, he clearly does not apply this term to the engendered things. Therefore his own usage of the expression does not bear any resemblance to the way Farghānī uses it in his *Tā'iyya* commentary.

If Ibn ʿArabī did not use an expression like *waḥdat al-wujūd* to describe an issue that is ultimately unfathomable, he must have had good reasons for doing so, and Qunāwī, with his prudent attitude, was obviously aware of that. Farghānī, as Qunāwī's disciple, knew prudence too, but was nevertheless slightly more open in his expressions. What Farghānī's more explicit language might mean for his role in the coining of the term *waḥdat al-wujūd*, especially its semantics, is that he might have unintentionally spread, along with the term, a certain concept that is close to Ibn ʿArabī, but still not the same.

Among the later authors who, according to Chittick, ascribed 'technical senses' to the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* were Ibn Sabʿīn (d.1270), who was the last representative of the Arabic peripatetic school of philosophy, and ʿAzīz al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d.1300). These authors used *waḥdat al-wujūd* as a keyword for the fundamental nature of things, without mentioning the phenomenon of manyness at all. However, when the Ḥanbalī jurist Ibn Taymiyya (d.1328), who is considered Ibn ʿArabī's greatest opponent, strongly criticised *waḥdat al-wujūd*, it was precisely because he thought that this concept negated the difference between God and creation – and he referred to Ibn Sabʿīn for proof of this interpretation, not to Ibn ʿArabī or Farghānī. Nevertheless, Farghānī's notion of *waḥdat al-wujūd* differs from

31. Chittick, 'Last Will and Testament', 53.

authors like Ibn Sabʿīn and Nasafī, for unlike them, he gave a lot of consideration to manyness; or at least he acknowledged its relative reality.

On the basis of this argumentation one can gather that Farghānī's understanding of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is neither fully in agreement with Ibn ʿArabī's own ontological conceptions nor with those of later authors or opponents, which consequently makes Farghānī's own role in establishing *waḥdat al-wujūd* as a technical term even more questionable.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be said that Farghānī's way of using the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* does not support the assumption that he was responsible for establishing this technical term.

Firstly, Farghānī does not use the term *waḥdat al-wujūd* as an easily identifiable keyword, but as an indistinct expression that is often interwoven with other words. At least this acquits him of being one of those later authors whom Chittick charged with ascribing 'technical senses' to the expression.

Secondly, Farghānī often did not transfer the term from the Persian into the Arabic version of his *Tāʾiyya* commentary – which he surely would have done, if he had regarded it as a technical term. However, technical terms often arise retroactively. Due to the frequent occurrence of this term in Farghānī's *Tāʾiyya* commentaries and the immense popularity of this work, we can say that it was in the process of becoming one.

The reason for the frequent recurrence of the term could be that both the *Tāʾiyya* and Qūnawī's own thoughts and discussions revolve around the word *wujūd*. However, we must assume independent thinking on the part of Farghānī, not just mere reiteration of the words of his teacher, especially (but not solely) in the case of the Arabic edition.

Also, when it comes to the shaping of the meaning of the term, that is, the concept that became readily associated with the expression *waḥdat al-wujūd*, we cannot conclude that Farghānī is responsible, because his conceptions differed significantly from those of later authors who used the term frequently,

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like Ibn Sabʿīn and Nasafī, or those who strongly opposed it, like Ibn Taymiyya.

Farghānī's views are close to those of the Shaykh al-Akbar, although the latter generally formulated his views in a more ambiguous or paradoxical way. In Farghānī's case, a certain pantheistic undercurrent cannot be denied: he is a mystic and monist for whom *waḥdat al-wujūd* expresses the true and fundamental unity of all that exists. However, unlike Ibn ʿArabī, he repeatedly uses expressions like *al-wujūd al-ʿaynī al-ẓāhirī* (the entified, manifest being), yet these engendered forms of *wujūd* (being) are manifestations or emanations of the One Being (*al-wujūd al-wāḥid*). Having come about through the two Divine Self-disclosures, they do not possess an independent being of their own and they will eventually merge back into their origin. Farghānī's constant recourse to manyness in his lengthy discussions of oneness served not only to balance his view but perhaps also to keep orthodox opponents at bay.

Hence, the quest for the one who coined the technical term *waḥdat al-wujūd* continues and the question regarding its actual meaning is still a matter for debate. If one assumes that no single person was responsible for the establishment of the term, but rather that it was a process which involved many, then Farghānī certainly played a role in this.

The issue of the Oneness of Being at the time was – and still is – delicate, and great tact and diplomacy were demanded when discussing the subject. If Farghānī had wanted to use even more prudence, he would have ultimately had to keep silent on this matter, as Qunāwī recommended in his *Last Will*, and as the lyrical speaker of the *Tāʾiyya* suggests in verse 743, where it says:

> If it was not for the veil of the engendered existence, I would speak… But
>
> my holding on to the properties of the loci of manifestation makes me keep quiet.